

Edmund J. Forstall House  
920 St. Louis Street  
New Orleans  
Orleans Parish  
Louisiana

HABS No. LA-1114

HABS  
LA  
36-NEWOR  
62-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Eastern Office, Design and Construction  
143 South Third Street  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. LA-1114

## EDMUND J. FORSTALL HOUSE

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LA  
36-NEWOR  
62-

Address: 920 St. Louis Street, New Orleans, Orleans Parish,  
Louisiana.

Present Owner John C. Dodt, III.  
and Occupant:

Present Use: Residence.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

- A. Original and Subsequent Owners: The following chains of title were obtained from the files of the Vieux Carré Survey (533 Royal Street, New Orleans 16, Louisiana) in June 1964. The Survey, sponsored by the School of Architecture of Tulane University and financed by the Edward G. Schleider Foundation of New Orleans, has undertaken a three-year archival program in the Vieux Carré:

SQUARE 91 918-20 ST. LOUIS STREET

LOT NO. 11445

37'0"3' ' ' x 151'5"

## References

<u>Date &amp; COB</u>	<u>Notary</u>	<u>Transaction</u>
1957 June 18 616/445	R. R. Ramos	John C. Dodt, III from American General Savings and Loan Association.
1956 June 11 608/256	R. R. Ramos	American General Savings and Loan Association from Mrs. Clare Marguerite Goodspeed, divorced wife first of George D. Martin, widow second of John E. Holzer.
1954 July 30 594/696	C.D.C. 327,434	Mrs. Clare Marguerite Goodspeed Holzer inherited from John E. Holzer.
1922 March 31 343/514	A. M. Buchmann	John E. Holzer from Leopold Weil.
1921 Aug. 12 338/305	F. W. Hart	Leopold Weil from Vincent R. Perrin.

1920 March 31 321/133	F. D. Charbonnet	Vincent R. Perrin from Uniola Real Estate Company through American Homestead Company.
1915 Jan. 16 270/271	F. J. Dreyfous	Uniola Real Estate Company from Chalmette Laundry Company, Ltd.
1912 April 22 250/442	Sheriff's Sale	Chalmette Laundry Company, Ltd. from Robert J. Maloney.
1906 Nov. 22 210/329	W. F. Brewer	Robert J. Maloney from Joseph Anselme Mercier, et als.
1888 May 14 129/170	J. F. Meunier	Joseph Anselme Mercier, et als, from Harry D. Forsyth.
1886 Feb. 9 126/46	N. B. Trist	Harry D. Forsyth from Samuel G. Ward.
1880 Jan. 9 112/158	E. Grima	Samuel G. Ward from Succession of Mrs. Clara Durel, Widow of Edmond J. Forstall.
1880 Jan. 9 9/4	E. Grima	Mrs. Clara Durel Forstall inherited from Edmond J. Forstall. Probated in Parish Court of St. James, Louisiana.
1857 April 4 19/	J. Lisbony	Edmond J. Forstall from Edward D. Seghers.
1856 Jan. 30	Sheriff's Sale	Edward D. Seghers from Edward Seghers, Amelia Seghers, and Virginie Seghers. "The buildings and improvements consist of a three story and a half main brick house, slate roofed with dormer windows, iron balcony in front second and third story, one large room on first floor, two large rooms with fire- places and sliding doors and two small rooms on the second floor; one large room with fireplace and one small room on the third floor, and one small room in the attic; a three story brick house, slate roofed with gallery in front attached to the main house, having on the first floor three rooms, two with fireplaces; second floor three rooms, two with fireplaces; third floor four rooms, two with fireplaces and

a small garret; a two story brick house covered with zinc and built in the rear of the lot with gallery in front having one room below and one above; a two story brick kitchen, slate roofed, having one room below and two above with fireplaces, double brick privies slate roofed, yard paved with flagstones, water-works, large coach gate, etc. The house bears No. 145 and is now leased to the Southern Institute, expiring November 1857."

1839 June 22	A. Chiapella 1/421	Edward Seghers, Amelia Seghers, and Virginie Seghers from Dominique Seghers.
1836 Sept. 30	C. Pollock 52/	Dominique Seghers from Louis Frederic Foucher.
1832 June 6	T. Seghers 5/273	Louis Frederic Foucher from Pierre Joseph Tricou. Lot 60' by 142' together with buildings. Bound by the properties of Joan Mercier and Francois Gillet.
1831 July 30	C. Pollock 37/509	Pierre Joseph Tricou from Francois Meffre Rouzan. Lot 60' by 142' F.M.
1814 March 15	M. de Armas 8/121	Francois Meffre Rouzan from Jean Blaque.
1810 Dec. 17	P. Pedesclaux 67/494	Jean Blaque from estate of Bernard Chilloc. Lot 60' by 142' F. M. located between property of Le Breton Dorgeny and Francois Gourmoule.
1782 Aug. 14	L. Mazange 6/733	Bernard Chilloc from Thomas Hoffpauer.

SQUARE 91  
LOT No. 11443

<u>Date &amp; COB</u>	<u>Notary</u>	<u>Transaction</u>
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measuring 28' front on Dauphine by 90' of depth. Bounded on one side by the property now or formerly of Narcisse Broutin, and on the other side by Mr. Castangeaud.

1818 Aug. 29	P. Pedesclaux 5/713	Louis P. Laporte, represented by Mrs. Marianne Adelaide Carstens, wife of Louis Pierre Laporte, from Mrs. Eleonore Villaseca, wife separated in property of Francois Brou.
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1807 April 6	Private Signature	Marie Eleonore Villaseca from her grandmother, Mrs. Charlotte Troxclair, second wife of Bernard Chilloc. Described in an Act of Partition made between Balderio Thomas Villaseca and Bernard Chilloc.
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B. Date of Erection: 1857

C. Architect: An article by John P. Coleman on the Forstall House in 1923 (see "Sources of Information" for reference) indicated that James Gallier, Sr. and Richard Esterbrook were the architects. Another newspaper article in 1957 (see "Sources of Information") indicated that "... Richard Esterbrook in collaboration with either James Gallier, Sr., or James Gallier, Jr., or possibly both" were the architects. According to the recent researches of Samuel Wilson, Jr., FAIA, a New Orleans' architect and widely respected expert on local architectural history, James Gallier, Sr. was generally inactive professionally after 1848. By 1857 his former architectural firm had been turned over to his son, James Gallier, Jr., and John Turpin and Richard Esterbrook--working under the name "Gallier, Turpin and Company." The inference that can be drawn from this information is that the "architect" of the Forstall House was Gallier, Turpin and Company, probably with Esterbrook as the partner in charge.

D. Builder, suppliers, etc.: Research has not indicated who these were; however, it is known that Gallier, Turpin and Company often built the structures that they designed. This practice was common in New Orleans in this period.

E. Notes on original plan and construction of building: A photocopy of an architect's drawing (elevation) in the Sylvester Labrot Collection of Gallier drawings (in the Manuscript

Division, Howard Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University; New Orleans, Louisiana) is included in the HABS records of the Edmund J. Forstall House at the Library of Congress. Although this drawing was not originally labeled as the Forstall House and although it is partially unfinished, it can with fair certainty be designated as this house because of the dimensions, treatment, and the fact that it was part of a collection of Gallier drawings.

The following descriptive account of the building as it was before its conversion to various commercial uses is extracted from Coleman's 1923 article in the New Orleans States:

An imposing three-story brick stuccoed building and attic, with an exceptionally handsome front, this lovely mansion was erected some eighty years ago by Edward [sic] John Forstall . . .

The front entrance was elevated about four feet from the sidewalk, and led into a spacious hallway, running from the front to the dining room, a superb apartment [sic]. On the same floor adjoining the dining room, was the magnificent double parlor, arched and separated from the dining room by beautiful carved sliding doors.

Both parlors and dining room were painted in frescoe [sic], the subjects representing flowers, leaves and the figures of a dragon. Over the artistically sculptured marble mantelpiece in the parlors and in the dining room, was the Forstall court [sic] of arms, also in frescoe. . . . The ceilings in these rooms were fully eighteen feet in height, the large wide windows coming to the floor. There were beautiful marble mantels in every room in the main building, and the richly carved door at the front entrance, as well as the doors connecting the double parlors and the dining room with the main hall, were of mahogany.

Back of the parlor was an immense gallery enclosed with white frosted glass which was so constructed as to permit of its opening or closing as conditions of the weather made desirable. This conservatory was brilliant and odorous with the rarest exotics, gathered from all lands, . . .

On the second floor the large hallway corresponded with the hall below and like it, was very handsome. Here was another conservatory constructed just as was the one on the first floor filled with flowers and odors that made it perfectly enchanting. Here was the sleeping apartments, the rooms being handsomely furnished, with a bath room and toilet for the ladies and another for the gentlemen.

A large linen room was connected with the service stairway and in the rear an immense billiard room, as also the library, a vey [sic] fine apartment filled with the choicest literature both in the English and French language in bookcases beautifully carved and of rose-wood and mahogany. The apartments on the third floor were the same both in design and finish as those on the second floor, except that the [sic] were occupied exclusively as bed rooms. There were four rooms in the attic furnished just as were the two floors below.

All the furnishings from the top to bottom of the building were of the antique order--four-post beds, Victoria beds, velvet and brocade portieres, velvet carpets and other more comfortable adjustments of our great grandfathers' times. The furniture was from the celebrated house of Mallard and Segnorette of Paris. In every room there was a profusion of lovely bronzes, brasses, immense beveled glass mirrors reaching from floor to ceiling, oil paintings, portraits of the family, landscapes, etc., all executed by world renowned artists. Cut glass chandeliers were in every room both in brasses and bronze.

In the annex there were quarters for the servants, the pantry, larder, kitchen and a wine cellar of extra dimensions. There was also a stable, carriage house, coal and wood shed. The gallery in the rear of the parlor opened on the court yard--one of the most extensive and carefully cultivated in New Orleans.

#### A Beautiful Garden

Mr. Forstall with his family, traveled extensively, and upon returning invariably brought back a great variety of rare plants--said to be the rarest in this city if not the rarest in the country.

. . . . There was a key-lot opening on Dauphine street, used as a carriage exit and entrance on either side of which were lawns covered with roses. . . .

. . . . .

- F. Notes on known alterations and additions: A feature article in a 1957 edition of the Times-Picayune Roto Magazine (see "Sources of Information") indicated the many changes which the Forstall House has undergone:

A century-old building last used as a warehouse and pigeon roost has been transformed into a three-story dwelling at 920 St. Louis, in the French Quarter.

It is the former Forstall home, come to life once again

in time for its 100th birthday. The young New Orleanian who bought and restored it now occupies the entire first floor. He is John C. Dodt III.

He found only a shell of a building that once had been a proud Vieux Carre landmark. . . .

. . . . .

The structure now combines the beauty of 1857 Louisiana architecture with such 1957 conveniences as complete air-conditioning and a large swimming pool.

It took six months to remodel--but half the time was required to rout the pigeons, says Leon Impastato, the architect. . . .

The building is constructed of brick and masonry. The facade has fan-light windows on top and bottom floors. Wrought-iron grillwork ornaments the upper-story windows. The second floor is made up of guest apartments. The third floor and attic are unfurnished thus far. . . .

The two-page article also included a photograph of the front elevation, four photographs of the remodelled interior, and a renovation first-floor plan.

On December 30, 1962 the renovated Forstall House was included on a "patio tour" sponsored by the Phi Kappa Sigma Fraternity. A mimeographed sheet, which included some descriptive passages of the house, was distributed. Both author and sources of information are not known, but it is of use as a supplementary reference, since those who were concerned with the extensive renovation obviously knew of this leaflet and its contents. A few paragraphs have been extracted:

. . . on the decline, if not demise, of the area [Vieux Carré] over the next century, the building suffered the indignities of serving as a toy-assembly center, warehouse for construction materials, a garage, and even a house of ill repute. During this period, all decor, plaster, walls, windows, doors, even floors, were removed. All that remained was a condemned empty shell, without gas, electricity, water, or even hope.

The restoration dramatized a successful attempt to bring the building back to its original magnificence. The facade remains in its original splendor of lofty columns. . . with only the iron gates added in the style of the period. The interiors are completely contemporary in comfort and convenience, while retaining all the grandeur and charm of age.



Most of the plantings (and, of course, the swimming pool) in the immense L-shaped patio were unknown to the original owners, who, nevertheless boasted a "fine selection of exotic plants." In keeping with the dignity of the building, the gardens are planted in a formal manner, a rather unique aspect in the use of lush tropical foliage.

Since the interior of the structure is almost entirely a mid-20th century "development", it is not possible to write an accurate architectural account of the 1857 building.

- G. Historical Events and Persons Associated with Building:  
The following is from the New Orleans States, "New Orleans' Famous Mansions; The Once Beautiful Home of the Forstalls", February 11, 1923, p. 11:

Mr. E. J. Forstall was the representative in New Orleans of the English banking firm of Baring Brothers, as also Hope and Labouchere of Amsterdam, besides which he was a very wealthy sugar planter and owner of the fine plantation in St. James parish known as the "St. James Estate." . . .

- H. Sources of Information: Primary and unpublished sources:

Phi Kappa Sigma Fraternity. "French Quarter Patio Tour." New Orleans, December 30, 1962. (mimeographed Tour Guide).

The Vieux Carré Survey. Interview with Mr. Boyd Cruise, executive director. June, 1964.

Villéré, Mrs. Henri Francois (née Adele Frances Forstall), 834 Governor Nichols Street, New Orleans, Louisiana 70116. Interview with Mrs. Villéré, who is a direct descendant of the builder and owner of the Forstall House. June, 1964.

Secondary and published sources:

"Beauty of 1857 plus Convenience of 1957," Dixie-- Times-Picayune Roto Magazine, October 27, 1957. pp. 10-11.

Colman, John P. "New Orleans' Famous Mansions; the Once Beautiful Home of the Forstalls," New Orleans States, February 11, 1923. p. 11.

Tallmadge, Thomas E. Story of Architecture in America. New York: Norton, 1936 (revised ed.).

- I. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated: Gallier, James Sr. Autobiography of James Gallier, Architect. Paris: E. Brière, 1864.

Prepared by John C. Poppeliers  
Architectural Historian  
National Park Service  
November 1964